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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6710
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4449
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3065
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7600
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1670
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5004
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Syria/Macedonia, Syria/US, Terrorism, Iraq, Palestinian Territories (4/11)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Apr. 11 reported President Asad's and VP Shara's meetings on Apr. 10 with Macedonian Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki. Talks dealt with bilateral relations and the latest developments in the Balkans and the Middle East.

Papers also featured a statement by Tom Lantos, Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives, that he wants to visit Syria again and "will not bow to the Bush Administration's policy, which denies contacts with those who disagree in opinion with it."

Papers also cited statements by two members of the US House of Representatives who accompanied Speaker Pelosi on her visit to Syria, emphasizing the importance of the visit in opening channels of dialogue which can lead to understanding and solutions to the problems in the region. Keith Ellison, a Democrat from Minnesota, told reporters following his return to Washington that it is important to keep channels of dialogue open with Syria and that the US delegation's visit to the Middle East was useful and exploratory and sent the message that the United States wants to cooperate with the peoples of the Middle East. Another Democrat, Louise Slaughter, from New York, said that that the US delegation's visit to Syria aimed at holding talks with Syrian officials on how the United States can contribute to improving the situation there. She indicated that although President Bush runs US foreign policy, the US Congress finances it, hence the importance of the visit to the Middle East. She pointed out that the visits of 14 congressmen to Syria in the past few months have helped curb White House criticism of such visits.

Papers also reported the inauguration of a conference on "International Law and Challenges in the 21st Century" at Damascus University on Apr. 10, organized by the Orient Center for Economic and International Studies, in cooperation with the UK Embassy in Damascus. "The conference sheds light on some challenges facing international law, particularly after 9/11, which resulted in a group of new legal concepts, starting with adoption of UNSC Resolution 1373, which defined terrorism as a threat to international peace and security," said Ghassan Obeid, Director of International Relations at the Syrian Foreign Ministry. He added: "The US exploited this resolution, considering the 9/11 events as an

armed attack, making it a pretext to use force against other countries, in a way that is a violation of international law." "It is not acceptable for any state, on the pretext that its national security is threatened, to commit violations against human rights, including the rights of life, liberty and freedom from torture." A Professor of International Law at Damascus University, Aboud Saraj, stressed that Syria was one of the first countries to combat terrorism and called in 1986 for an international conference to define terrorism. "While the UN was able to take a courageous stance against US preparations to attack Iraq in 2003, it has failed to solve a lot of conflicts and issues, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has continued for decades," Dr. Saraj said. British Ambassador in Damascus John Jenkins expressed hope that the conference would be a turning point that could find active solutions to a number of threats and challenges facing international law. The Director of the Orient Center, Samir al-Taki, charged that US and Israeli circles try to use international law as a tool to justify aggression, reinforce the concept of preemptive wars and intervene in internal affairs of sovereign countries. The 2-day conference will discuss the role of civil societies in avoiding conflicts and accountability in the international community.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"International Crisis Group: Israel has to return to negotiations with Syria" (Independent al-Watan, 4/11)

"President Asad reviews the latest developments in the region and Syrian-Macedonian relations, with Macedonian Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/11)

"Democratic Member of the US House of Representatives and Chairman of the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs Tom Lantos:

President Asad strongly encourages continuation of the Syrian-American dialogue. Congressmen who accompanied Pelosi express satisfaction with the outcome of visit to Damascus" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/11)

"European Union Ambassador to Damascus: We seek an important association agreement with Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/11)

"Lebanese national opposition: The US Embassy in Beirut is an operation room to stir up sedition in Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/11)

"US Newspaper 'Washington Post': Israeli settlements are worse than racial discrimination" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/11)

"Conference of 'International Law and Challenges in the 21st Century' inaugurated at Damascus University. America endeavors to reinforce the concept of preemptive wars" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/11)

"The US Congress excludes forces of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas from financial siege. Hanieh: Releasing Shalit depends on responding to our demands" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/11)

¶3. Editorial Block Quotes:

"The Right Thing"

Umar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishrin, wrote (4/11): "When some American politicians say that US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi did the right thing when she visited Damascus and that Condoleezza Rice must do the same thing because dialogue with Syria is very important, this means that some Americans outside the circle of the neoconservatives now realize the big flaw in their country's foreign policy and the need to correct the accumulated mistakes that resulted from the use of crooked methods to address the issues of the region, methods that do not befit a superpower with the responsibility of serving justice and implementing international law and UN resolutions....

"The US politicians who visited Syria found out that Syria's picture

is different from the one painted by neoconservatives, which entailed unfairness, preconceptions, and forging of facts.... "There must a constructive dialogue between Damascus and Washington to reach common denominators that will help resolve the existing crisis, which has become complicated due to the mistakes of US policy, whether in Iraq or in the occupied Arab territories...."

"Correcting Mistakes"

Adnan Ali, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (4/11): "Pelosi's visit gave another signal that the policy of isolation and siege that the Bush administration has adopted toward Syria is crumbling....

"Any policy ignoring Syria's role in the region is necessarily wrong.... Dialogue between Damascus and Washington should proceed from an acknowledgement of a fact that Democrats in the United States are loudly announcing, namely, that the policies of Bush's administration in Iraq have failed because they are based on force and arrogance and because of the mistaken decision to invade Iraq without a logical reason."

"Even after a While"

Ali Qasim, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (4/11): "Remarks by British magazine The Economist that Syria managed, through President Asad's intelligence, patience, and firm positions, to overcome circumstances and the pressure it came under, are fair....

"A number of the members of the US House of Representatives who accompanied the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, on her visit to Syria, emphasized the importance of the visit in opening channels of dialogue which would lead to understanding and finding solutions to the problems in the

region....

"Many of those who wagered on isolating Syria found themselves ultimately isolated from issues of the region, and those who deluded themselves into thinking that pressure could force Syria to change its positions and principles collided with the fact that everyone now can see, namely, that others were forced to change their positions...."

"An Authoritative Administration"

Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (4/11): "If the US Administration really believes in democracy, then it must listen to the American people who are calling for withdrawal from Iraq and to the Iraqi people who demonstrated against US occupation on its fourth anniversary of the fall of Baghdad....

"President Bush still wagers on time and promises to achieve some success on the ground, despite the absence of any political or operational factors to give him a glimpse of hope. This proves his despotism in decision-making and, consequently, his indifference to the lives of US soldiers and the reputation of the United States in the world...."

Corbin